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Contras Undergoing Behind-the-Scenes Shakeup

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The chief U.S.-backed Nicaraguan rebel group, concerned about charges of mismanagement, is engaged in a behind-the-scenes reorganization that has put a Miami-based exiled businessman in charge of coordinating financial and political operations.

But Nicaraguans close to the United Nicaraguan Opposition (UNO) say the shakeup has been kept quiet for fear it could jeopardize President Reagan's \$100 million aid request by acknowledging existing problems in handling earlier U.S. assistance.

The Democratic-controlled House is scheduled to reconsider Reagan's proposal for military and other aid on April 15, after defeating it last month. Reagan's proposal narrowly cleared the Republican-dominated Senate on March 27.

Leonardo Somarriba, an American-educated businessman who runs a printing company in Miami, was named UNO's secretary general last month although the appointment has not been publicly announced. He is preparing plans for an overhaul of the rebel group's internal operations.

In a recent interview with The Associated Press, Somarriba accepted the characterization of his new role as UNO's "chief executive officer" and said he would try to "establish a structure so the three members (of UNO's directorate) can work together. ...I personally have no political ambitions."

Somarriba's appointment represents an apparent shift in power away from the umbrella group's three publicly known directors: Adolfo Calero, who also heads the chief rebel army, the CIA-organized Nicaraguan Democratic Force, FDN, and two former Sandinista officials, Arturo Cruz and Alfonso Robelo.

It follows mounting complaints from Nicaraguan exiles that UNO created at White House urging last June had failed to achieve either political or military unity in the war against Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government. The exiles have also criticized UNO for its handling of U.S. funds and nepotism.

The Nicaraguan Business Council, a group of exiled business leaders who have worked with UNO, outlined the complaints in a heated, private meeting with the three UNO directors in Miami on Jan. 18, according to several participants who spoke on condition of anonymity.

With Somarriba acting as their spokesman, the Nicaraguan businessmen criticized UNO's leadership for its internal bickering, subservience to the United States and the naming of cronies to key jobs, the participants said.

The participants said Calero reacted angrily to the criticism, but added that Cruz and Robelo were receptive.

FDN spokesman Matamoros said Calero was traveling and unavailable for comment.